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USDA Offers Disaster Assistance to Farmers and Livestock Producers in Florida Impacted by Hurricane Idalia

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Valdosta, Sept. 12, 2023 – Florida agricultural operations have been significantly impacted by Hurricane Idalia and related weather events. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has technical and financial assistance available to help farmers and livestock producers recover. Impacted producers should contact their local USDA Service Center to report losses and learn more about program options available to assist in their recovery from crop, land, infrastructure and livestock losses and damages.

“USDA stands ready to assist our Southeast farmers, livestock producers, landowners, and restore farmland, forests and watersheds in the aftermath of Hurricane Idalia,” said Robert Bonnie, Under Secretary for Farm Production and Conservation (FPAC). “USDA employees are working diligently to deliver FPAC’s extensive portfolio of disaster assistance programs and services.”

USDA Disaster Assistance

Producers who experience livestock deaths may be eligible for the [Livestock Indemnity Program](#) (LIP). To participate in LIP, producers will be required to provide verifiable documentation of death losses resulting from an eligible adverse weather event and must submit a notice of loss to their local FSA office within 30 calendar days of when the loss of livestock is apparent.

Meanwhile, the [Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honeybees, and Farm-Raised Fish Program](#) (ELAP) compensates eligible producers for hive loss, stored feed and grazing losses. For ELAP, producers will need to file a notice of loss within 30 days and honeybee losses within 15 days.

Additionally, eligible orchardists and nursery tree growers may be eligible for cost-share assistance through the [Tree Assistance Program](#) (TAP) to replant or rehabilitate eligible trees, bushes or vines lost. This complements [Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program](#) or crop insurance coverage, which covers the crop but not the plants or trees in all cases. For TAP, a program application must be filed within 90 days.

“Once you are able to safely evaluate the impact on your operation, be sure to contact your [local FSA office](#) or email us at SM.FPAC.FSA.FLFSA.Disaster@usda.gov to timely report all crop, livestock and farm infrastructure damages and losses,” said Deborah Tannenbaum, State Executive Director for the Farm Service Agency (FSA) in Florida. “To expedite FSA disaster assistance, you will likely need to provide documents, such as farm records, herd inventory, receipts and pictures of damages or losses.”

FSA also offers a variety of direct and guaranteed farm loans, including operating and emergency [farm loans](#), to producers who cannot secure commercial financing. Producers in counties with a primary or contiguous disaster designation may be eligible for low-interest [emergency loans](#) to help them recover from production and physical losses. Loans can help producers replace essential property, purchase inputs like livestock, equipment, feed and seed, cover family living expenses or refinance farm-related debts and other needs. Additionally, FSA has a variety of loan servicing options available for borrowers who are unable to make scheduled payments on their farm loan debt to FSA because of reasons beyond their control.

FSA borrowers who have concerns about making their upcoming direct FSA loan installment payment or who have already missed a recent installment payment may be eligible for assistance with cash flow concerns. Borrowers can contact their local FSA office or the FSA Call Center at 877-508-8364 between 8 a.m. and 7 p.m. ET to inquire about eligibility.

Risk Management

Producers who have risk protection through [federal crop insurance](#) or FSA's [NAP](#) should report crop damage to their crop insurance agent or FSA office. If they have crop insurance, producers should report crop damage to their agent within 72 hours of damage discovery and follow up in writing within 15 days. Additionally, producers who had hurricane and tropical storm coverage through RMA's [Hurricane Insurance Protection - Wind Index](#) will receive payments within a few weeks if their county qualified. Please check with your crop insurance agent for more information and updates.

For NAP covered crops, a [Notice of Loss \(CCC-576\)](#) must be filed within 15 days of the loss becoming apparent, except for hand-harvested crops, which should be reported within 72 hours.

"Crop insurance and other USDA risk management options are there to help producers manage risk because we never know what nature has in store for the future," said Davina Lee, Director of RMA's Regional Office that covers the Southeast. "The Approved Insurance Providers, loss adjusters and agents are experienced and well trained in handling these types of events."

Producers who have not applied for NAP coverage may still be covered. FSA has [updated NAP](#) to remove barriers and establish procedures through which an underserved producer with a CCC-860, *Socially Disadvantaged, Limited Resource, Beginning and Veteran Farmer or Rancher Certification* on file prior to the applicable NAP application closing date will automatically receive basic coverage for any NAP-eligible crops. Like all NAP-covered producers, underserved producers will still need to file a notice of loss and apply for program benefits.

Conservation

FSA's [Emergency Conservation Program](#) (ECP) and [Emergency Forest Restoration Program](#) (EFRP) assists landowners and forest stewards with financial and technical assistance to restore fencing, remove debris, replace damaged irrigation system, land leveling and more. FSA has updated ECP policy to permit advance payments up to 25% of costs for all ECP practices.

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) [Environmental Quality Incentives Program](#) (EQIP) can play a vital role in assisting producers recover from natural disasters like hurricanes and floods. Through EQIP, NRCS provides financial

assistance to repair and prevent the excessive soil erosion caused or impacted by natural disasters.

NRCS will hold an Emergency EQIP Signup for states affected by Hurricane Idalia and will finalize defining geographic areas and eligible conservation practices, as well as fund assessment needs, based on the disaster zone declarations. Eligible conservation practices will vary by state.

Assistance for Communities

NRCS administers the [Emergency Watershed Protection](#) (EWP) program, which assists local government sponsors with the cost of addressing watershed impairments or hazards such as debris removal and streambank stabilization. The EWP Program is a recovery effort aimed at relieving imminent hazards to life and property caused by floods, fires, windstorms and other natural disasters. All projects must have an eligible project sponsor. NRCS may bear up to 75% of the eligible construction cost of emergency measures (90% within county-wide limited-resource areas as identified by the U.S. Census data). The remaining costs must come from local sources and can be in the form of cash or in-kind services.

EWP is designed for installation of recovery measures to safeguard life and property as a result of a natural disaster. Threats that the EWP Program addresses are termed watershed impairments. These include, but are not limited to:

- Debris-clogged waterways.
- Unstable streambanks.
- Severe erosion jeopardizing public infrastructure.
- Wind-borne debris removal.

Eligible sponsors include cities, counties, towns or any federally recognized Native American tribe or tribal organizations. Sponsors must be able to provide the local construction share, obtain permits and site access, and agree to perform operations and maintenance of the constructed projects. Willing sponsors must submit a formal assistance request (by mail or email) to the state conservationist within 60 days of the natural disaster occurrence or 60 days from the date when access to the sites become available. For more information, potential sponsors should contact their [local NRCS office](#).

“EWP provides immediate assistance to communities to mitigate potential hazards to life and property resulting from disasters and particularly the severe erosion and flooding that can occur,” said Juan Hernandez, State Conservationist for the NRCS in Florida. “EWP allows us to work with local sponsors to help damaged watersheds so that lives and property are protected while preventing further devastation in the community.”

More Information

On farmers.gov, the [Disaster Assistance Discovery Tool](#), [Disaster-at-a-Glance fact sheet](#), and [Farm Loan Discovery Tool](#) can help producers and landowners determine program or loan options. For assistance with a crop insurance claim, producers and landowners should contact their [crop insurance agent](#). For FSA and NRCS programs, they should contact their local [USDA Service Center](#).

USDA touches the lives of all Americans each day in so many positive ways. In the Biden-Harris administration, USDA is transforming America’s food system with a greater focus on more resilient local and regional food production, fairer markets for all producers, ensuring access to healthy and nutritious food in all communities, building new markets and streams of income for farmers and producers using climate smart food and forestry practices, making historic investments in infrastructure and clean energy capabilities in rural America, and committing to equity across the Department by removing systemic barriers and building a workforce more representative of America. To learn more, visit www.usda.gov.

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Risk Management Agency:

2108 E. Hill Ave. Valdosta, GA 31601
Davina Lee, Director

Contact:

FPAC Press Desk

FPAC.BC.Press@usda.gov